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Peoples, Hanne; Brandt, Åse; Wæhrens, Eva Elisabet Ejlersen; la Cour, Karen

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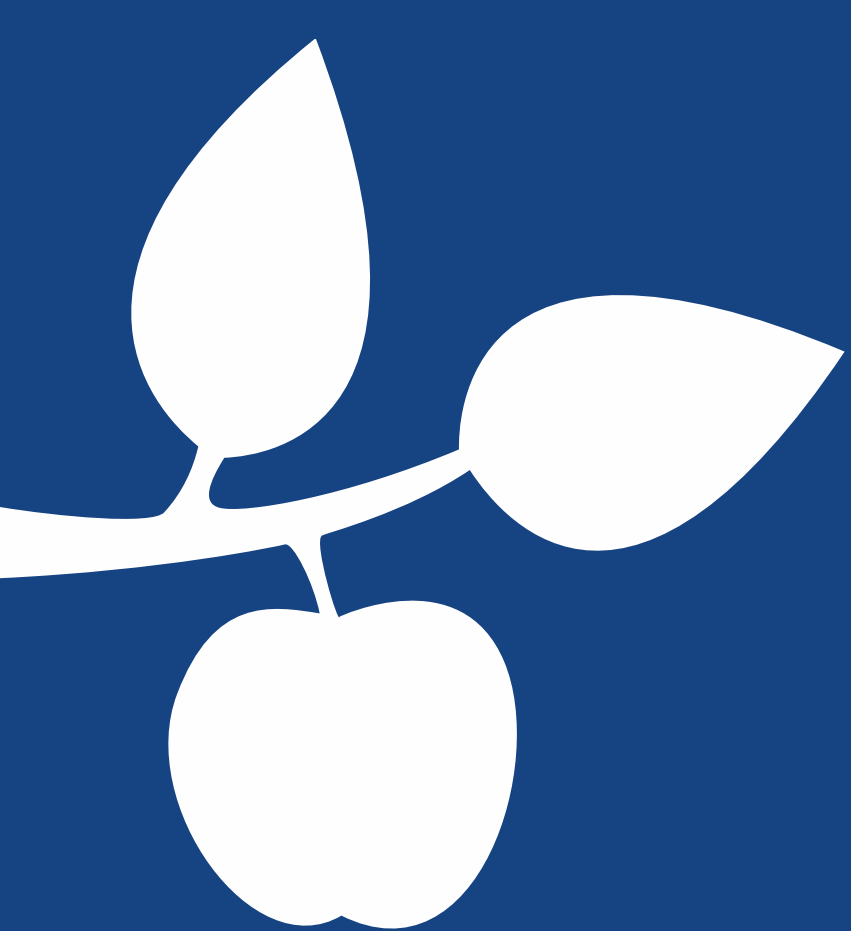
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Managing occupations in everyday life for people with advanced cancer at home

Hanne Peoples, Åse Brandt, Eva Wæhrens, Karen la Cour

University of Southern Denmark, Department of Public Health, Research Unit for General Practice, The Research Initiative for Activity Studies and Occupational Therapy

Introduction

People with advanced cancer can live increasingly longer. Advanced cancer can cause functional limitations influencing the ability to manage occupations. Although studies have shown that people with advanced cancer experience occupational difficulties, few studies explore how these difficulties are managed.

Objective

The objective was to describe and explore how people with advanced cancer manage occupations when living at home.

Method and material

A qualitative descriptive design was applied. The sample comprised 73 participants (53% male), mean age 68.3 years (36-89), 26 (36%) lived alone.

Data collection:

Semi-structured interviews were performed in the participants' homes, and structured around four open questions:

- *Can you please describe a typical day?*
- *How do the occupations your day consists of work for you?*
- *Have any of your occupations changed or gained a new meaning after you contracted cancer?*
- *In which way do you organize your everyday life?*

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis:

The data were analyzed using a qualitative inductive content analysis.



Findings

Managing occupations was manifested in two categories:

- 1) **Conditions influencing occupations in everyday life.**
- 2) **Self-developed strategies to manage occupations.**

CONDITIONS INFLUENCING OCCUPATIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The participants talked about various conditions that influenced their ability to manage occupations:

- a) Their functional ability that could change from day to day and during the course of the day, shaping how their day would unfold.
- b) Variations in treatment influencing their day-to-day rhythm.
- c) How the progression of the cancer influenced their perception of a "normal" everyday life.



- 30 (41%) participants described how sedentary indoor occupations now dominated their everyday lives.
- Changes in the ability to manage occupations influenced well-established daily routines.
- 25 (34%) participants talked about loss of occupations that used to be a valued part of their everyday lives.
- 51 (70%) participants needed support from family, friends and neighbours. Only 15 (21%) received social service.



SELF-DEVELOPED STRATEGIES TO MANGE OCCUPATIONS

66 (90%) experienced difficulties managing occupations.

The participants developed strategies to continue occupational engagement, e.g.:

- ordering groceries online when independent shopping was no longer possible.
- taking breaks between each occupation.
- splitting occupations into smaller parts.
- performing occupations at a slower pace.
- setting short-term goals.
- using assistive devices.

Some strategies proved to be counterproductive, e.g. on-line shopping, that increased isolation, since the participants no longer had casual encounter with other people during shopping.

Managing routine occupations could take most of the day, leaving less time and energy for other more personal meaningful occupations.

Conclusion

Many of the participants described an everyday life that was deprived of personal meaningful occupations, e.g. due to loss of occupations that used to be part of their everyday lives. The findings suggest that people with advanced cancer to a greater extent needs support in ways to manage familiar as well as more personally meaningful occupations to enhance quality of life.



Hanne Peoples, PhD stud.
hpeoples@health.sdu.dk